| Home | New Testament Studies | Romans Table of Contents | Previous Section | Next Section |

ROMANS 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS[4]	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Righteous Judgment of God	God's Righteous Judgment	Jews Under Judgment	God's Judgment	The Jews are Not Exempt From the Retribution of God
2:1-16	2:1-16	2:1-11	2:1-16	2:1-11
The Jews and the Law	The Jews Guilty as the Gentiles	Basis For Judgment	The Jews and the Law (2:17-3:8)	The Law Will Not Save Them
		2:12-16		2:12-16
2:17-3:8	2:17-24	2:17-24	2:17-24	2:17-24
	Circumcision of No Avail			Circumcision Will Not Save Them
	2:25-29	2:25-29	2:25-29	2:25-29

READING CYCLE THREE (see "Bible Interpretation Seminar")
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3). Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS ON ROMANS 2:1-3:20

A. Romans 2:1-3:20 complete the literary unit started in Rom. 1:18. This section deals with:
   1. the lostness of all mankind
   2. God's judgment on sin
   3. mankind's need for God's righteousness through Christ by means of personal faith and repentance

B. In Romans 2 there are seven principles concerning God's judgment
   1. verse 2, according to the truth

2. verse 5, accumulated guilt
3. verses 6 and 7, according to works
4. verse 11, no respecter of persons
5. verse 13, lifestyle
6. verse 16, the secrets of men's hearts
7. verses 17-29, no special national groups

C. There is much discussion among commentators about who was being addressed in Rom. 2:1-16. It is obvious that Rom. 2:17-29 deals with the Jews. Verses 1-16 serve the dual purpose of speaking both to moral pagans like Seneca (societal norms) and to the Jewish nation (Mosaic Law).

D. In Rom. 1:18-21, Paul asserted that humans can know God through creation. In Rom. 2:14-15, Paul also asserted that all humans have an inner moral conscience given by God. These two witnesses, creation and conscience, are the basis for God's condemnation of all mankind, even those who have not been exposed to the OT or the gospel message. Humans are responsible because they have not lived up to the best light they have had.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 2:1-11

[1]Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. [2]And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. [3]But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God? [4]Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? [5]But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [6]who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: [7]to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; [8]but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.[9]*There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, [10]but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [11]For there is no partiality with God.

2:1

NASB	**"you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment"**
NKJV	**"you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge"**
NRSV	**"you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others"**
TEV	**"You have no excuse at all, whoever you are. For then you judge others"**
NJB	**"So no matter who you are, if you pass judgment you have no excuse"**
REB	**"You have no defense, then, whoever you may be, when you sit in judgment"**
Peshitta	**"You are inexcusable, O man, to judge your neighbor"**

This is literally "no legal defense" (cf. Rom. 1:20). It was placed first in the Greek sentence to magnify its significance. Verses 1-16 seem to relate both to the self-righteous Jewish legalists and the Greek moralists. By their judging others they condemn themselves.

This same phrase is used in Rom. 1:20, but the PRONOUN is "they"; here "you." Obviously Paul is addressing different groupings of sinners/rebels. Of one of the groups he was once a zealous member! There are two problems.

1. rejecting and perverting the knowledge of God
2. turning it into a set of rules and becoming judgmental and self righteous

Also note that the "they" of chapter 1 becomes "you" in Rom. 2:1-8. It is universalized from Jews and Greeks into "every soul of man" in Rom. 2:9-11. Though there are different groups (either two or three groups) in the end it makes no difference, all are under judgment (cf. Rom. 3:23).

2:2 "we know" This PRONOUN probably referred to fellow Jews although it could possibly refer to Christians. In Rom. 2:2-4, Paul returns to his common technique of a question and answer format, called diatribe (i.e., Rom. 2:1-11,17-29), which was a presentation of truth by means of a supposed objector. It was also used by Habakkuk, Malachi, and the rabbis, as well as the Greek philosophers (such as Socrates and the Stoics).

The phrase "we know that" is used several times in Romans (cf. Rom. 2:2; 3:19; 7:14; 8:22,28). Paul assumes his hearers have some degree of knowledge, unlike the immoral pagans of Romans 1.

▣ **"the judgment of God"** The Bible is clear on this truth. All humans will give an account to God for the gift of life (cf. Rom. 2:5-9; 14:10-12; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15). Even Christians will stand before Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10).

SPECIAL TOPIC: JUDGMENT IN THE NT

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

2:3 The grammatical form of Paul's rhetorical question expects a "no" answer.

▣ **"do you suppose"** This is the Greek VERB *logizomai*. Paul uses it often (Rom. 2:3,26; 3:28; 4:3,4,5,6, 8,9,10,11,22,23,24; 6:11; 8:18,36; 9:8; 14:14; Gal. 3:6; ten times in 1 and 2 Corinthians, and twice in Philippians). See notes at Rom. 4:3 and 8:18.

▣ **"O man"** This matches the same idiom in Rom. 2:1. In Rom. 9:20 it refers to Jews.

2:4 This is also a question in Greek.

▣

NASB	**"think highly of"**
NKJV, NRSV, TEV, REB	**"despise"**
NJB	**"disregarding"**
NIV	**"show contempt"**
NET	**"have contempt for"**
Peshitta	**"stand against"**

By comparing English translations interpreters get a feel for the semantic range of the VERB. This is a strong term for willful rejection. See its use in

1. Jesus' words, Matt. 6:24; 18:10
2. Paul, 1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:2
3. Hebrews (of Jesus), 12:2
4. Peter, 2 Peter 2:10
5. the NOUN in Acts 13:41

▣ **"the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience"** Humans have often misunderstood God's grace, mercy, and patience and have turned them into an opportunity to sin instead of to repent (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9).

Paul often describes the attributes of God as "the riches of" (cf. Rom. 9:23; 11:33; Col. 1:27; Eph. 1:7,18; 2:4,7; 3:8,16; Phil. 4:19).

The NOUN "forbearance" is used only twice in the NT, both times by Paul in this literary unit (Rom. 1:18-3:31), here and Rom. 3:26. Both referring to God's patience with sinners.

▣ **"leads you to repentance"** Repentance is crucial for a faith-covenant relationship with God (cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 3:16,19; 20:21). The term in Hebrew meant a change of actions, while in Greek it meant a change of mind. Repentance is a willingness to change from one's self-centered existence to a life informed and directed by God. It calls for a turning from the priority and bondage of self. Basically it is a new attitude, a new worldview, a new master. Repentance is God's will for every fallen child of Adam, made in His image (cf. Ezek. 18:21,23,32 and 2 Pet. 3:9).

The NT passage which best reflects the different Greek terms for repentance is 2 Cor. 7:8-11.

1. *lupeō*, "grief" or "sorrow" in Rom. 2:8 (twice), 9 (thrice), 10 (twice), 11
2. *metamelomai*, "regret" or "after care," in Rom. 2:8 (twice), 9
3. *metanoia*, "repentance," or "after mind," in Rom. 2:9, 10

The contrast is false repentance (*metamelomai*) (cf. Judas, Matt. 27:3 and Esau, Heb. 12:16-17) versus true repentance (*metanoeō*).

True repentance is theologically linked to

1. Jesus' preaching on the conditions of the New Covenant (cf. Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3,5)
2. the apostolic sermons in Acts (*kerygma*, cf. Acts 3:16,19; 20:21)
3. God's sovereign gift (cf. Acts 5:31; 11:18 and 2 Tim. 2:25)
4. perishing (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9)

Repentance is not optional!

SPECIAL TOPIC: REPENTANCE (OT)

SPECIAL TOPIC: REPENTANCE (NT)

SPECIAL TOPIC: EASTERN LITERATURE (BIBLICAL PARADOXES), 2. O.

2:5-9 These verses describe (1) the stubbornness of fallen mankind and (2) God's anger and judgment.

2:5 "stubbornness" This NOUN is found only here in the NT. Israel is described in this same way in the LXX of Exod. 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6,13,27 (also note Heb. 3:8,15; 4:7).

▣ **"heart"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: HEART

▣ **"in the day of wrath"** This was called "The Day of the Lord" in the OT (cf. Joel, Amos; see SPECIAL TOPIC: THE DAY OF THE LORD). This is the concept of Judgment Day, or for believers, Resurrection Day. Mankind will give an account to God for His gift of life (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15).

Notice that it is the sinners themselves ("you" and "yourself") that store up wrath. God simply, at some point, allows this stored wrath to become evident and run its full course.

Wrath, like all human words to describe God, are only analogously (anthropomorphically, see SPECIAL TOPIC: GOD DESCRIBED AS HUMAN) applied to deity! God is eternal, holy, and Spirit. Humans are finite, sinful, and corporeal. God is not emotionally angry, as in a rage. The Bible presents Him as loving sinners and wanting them to repent, but also as having a settled

opposition to human rebellion. God is personal; He takes sin personally and we are personally responsible for our sin.

One additional thought about the wrath of God. In the Bible it is both in time (temporal, cf. Rom. 1:24,26,28) and at the end of time (eschatological, cf. Rom. 2:5-8). The Day of the Lord (Judgment Day) was one way the OT prophets warned Israel to repent at the present time so that their future would be blessed, not judged (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-28). The OT prophets often took a crisis of their day and projected it into the end-time future.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THAT DAY

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE LAST DAYS

2:6 This is a quote from Ps. 62:12 (cf. Matt. 16:27). It is a universal principle (see note at Rom. 2:1, 2nd paragraph) that humans are responsible for their actions and will give an account to God (cf. Job 34:11; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:8; Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). Even believers will give an account of their lives and service to Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). Believers are not saved by works but are saved unto works (cf. Eph. 2:8-10 [esp. 2:14-26]; James and 1 John). A changed and changing life of love, service, and selflessness is evidence of true salvation.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

2:7 "to those who" There is a contrast between the persons described in Rom. 2:7 and those in Rom. 2:8 ("but to those who").

▣

NASB	**"to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality; eternal life"**
NKJV	**"eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality"**
NRSV	**"to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life"**
TEV	**"Some men keep on doing good, and seek glory, honor and immortal life; to them God will give eternal life"**
NJB	**"For those who sought renown and honor and immortality by always doing good there will be eternal life"**
REB	**"To those who pursue glory, honour, and immortality by steady persistance in well-doing"**
Peshitta	**"To those who continue patiently in good work, seeking glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life"**

This referred to people like Cornelius (cf. Acts 10:34-35). This passage may sound like works righteousness (obtaining righteousness through human effort), but that would go against the major theme of the book of Romans. Remember that either Rom. 2:1-16 or Rom. 2:1-11 are a paragraph. The theological point of the whole is that God is no respecter of persons (v.11) and that all have sinned (Rom. 2:12). If people lived up to the light they had (natural revelation for the Gentiles, special revelation for the Jews, cf. Rom. 10:5) then they would be right with God. However, the summary of Rom. 3:9-18,23 shows that none ever have, nor can they!

A believer's changed godly life is seen as confirming and validating his initial faith response. A changed life is the evidence of the indwelling Spirit of God (cf. vv.10,13; Matthew 7; Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:14-26 and 1 John).

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NEED TO PERSEVERE

▣ **"eternal life"** This (*zōē*) is a characteristic phrase of John's writings which denotes new age life, and is used sparingly in the Synoptic Gospels. Paul seems to derive the phrase from Dan. 12:2 (cf. Titus 1:2; 3:7), where it denotes the life of the new age, life in fellowship with God, resurrection life. He first uses it in Gal. 6:8. It is a common theme in the doctrinal section of Romans (cf. Rom. 2:7; 5:21; 6:22,23). It also occurs several times in the Pastoral Epistles (cf. 1 Tim. 1:16; Titus 1:2; 3:7).

2:8

NASB	**"those who are selfishly ambitious"**
NKJV, NRSV	**"those who are self-seeking"**
TEV	**"other people are selfish"**
NJB	**"those who out of jealousy"**

The term originally meant "work for hire" (cf. Tob. 2:11).

Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, vol. 2, p. 104, list two usages of this term.

1. "selfish ambition," using Rom. 2:8 noting "wanting to be better than someone else," which fits this context
2. "hostility," using Phil. 1:17 noting "rivalry" as a translation option (see also 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 2:3; James 3:14,16)

▣ **"and do not obey the truth,"** The term "truth" (*aletheia*) was used in its Hebrew sense (*emeth*) of truthfulness and trustworthiness. In this context, it had a moral, not intellectual, focus.

SPECIAL TOPIC: "TRUTH" IN PAUL'S WRITINGS

2:9 "for every soul of man" Paul used the Greek term *pas* translated "all" or "every" so often in these opening chapters of Romans to show the universal implications of both the "bad news" (mankind's lostness and God's no-partiality judgment) and the "good news" (God's offer of free salvation and complete forgiveness in Christ to all who repent and believe).

This context strongly implies a universal judgment and its resulting consequences. This truth demands a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (cf. Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).

If verses 6-11 are a chiasma, then Rom. 2:8-9 are the key verses which denote judgment on evil doers.

SPECIAL TOPIC: HEBREW POETRY , III. A. 4.

2:9-10 "the Jew first" This is repeated for emphasis. The Jew was first in opportunity because they had God's revelation (cf. Rom. 1:16; Matt. 10:6; 15:24; John 4:22; Acts 3:26; 13:46), but also first in judgment (cf. vv. 9-11) because they had God's Revelation (cf. Rom. 9:4-5).

2:11

NASB, NKJV	**"for there is no partiality with God"**
NRSV	**"For God shows no partiality"**
TEV	**"For God judges everyone by the same standard"**
NJB	**"There is no favoritism with God"**
REB	**"God has no favorites"**
Peshitta	**"For there is no respect of persons with God"**

Literally this is "to lift the face," which was imagery from the judicial system of the OT (cf. Lev. 19:15; Deut. 10:17; 2 Chr. 19:7; Acts 10:34; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17). If a

judge saw to whom he was administering justice, there was a chance of bias. Therefore, he was not to lift the face of the one who stood before him with bowed head.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 2:12-16

[12]For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; [13]for *it is* not the hearers of the Law *who* are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. [14]For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, [15]in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, [16]on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

2:12 "for all who have sinned without the Law" God will hold all humans responsible even if they have never been exposed to the OT or the gospel. All people have some knowledge of God from creation (cf. Rom. 1:19-20; Ps. 19:1-6), and an innate moral sense, (cf. Rom. 2:14-15). The tragedy is that all have willfully violated the light they have (cf. Rom. 1:21-23; 3:9,19,23; 11:32; Gal. 3:22).

▣ **"the Law"** There is no ARTICLE with the term "law." This grammatical structure usually emphasized the quality of the NOUN. However, in Romans Paul uses "the law" to refer to several different things.

1. Roman Law
2. Mosaic Law
3. the concept of human societal mores in general

Context, not the ARTICLE, must reveal which one. This context emphasized that all humans have some knowledge of God's natural revelation of Himself in their hearts (cf. Rom. 2:15).

2:13 "for *it is* not the hearers of the Law *who* are just before God" The term "hearers" can refer to

1. rabbinical usage which had a specialized sense of rabbinical students of the Torah
2. those who heard the Scriptures read in synagogue

Remember the writers of the NT were Hebrew thinkers writing in Koine Greek. Therefore, word analysis must begin with the Septuagint, not a Greek lexicon.

The term "just" or "justified" (*dikē* in all its forms) is a crucial term in Paul's theology (cf. Rom. 3:4, 20,24,26,28,30; 4:2,5; 5:1,9; 6:7; 8:30,33). The words "just," "justify," "justification," "right," and "righteousness" are all derived from *dikaios*. In Hebrew (*tsadag*, BDB 843) it originally referred to a long straight reed (15 to 20 feet) which was used to measure things, such as walls or fences, for plumb. It came to be used metaphorically of God as the standard of judgment.
SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

In Paul's writings the term had two foci. First, God's own righteousness is given to sinful mankind as a free gift through faith in Christ. This is often called imputed righteousness or forensic righteousness. It refers to one's legal standing before a righteous God. This is the origin of Paul's famous "justification by grace through faith" theme.

Second, God's activity of restoring sinful mankind into His image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27), or to put it another way, to bring about Christlikeness. This verse-like Matt. 7:24; Luke 8:21 and 11:28; John 13:17; James 1:22-23,25-urges believers to be doers not just hearers. Imputed righteousness (justification) must result in righteous living (sanctification). God forgives and changes sinners! Paul's usage was both legal and ethical. The New Covenant gives humans a legal standing but also demands a godly lifestyle. It is free, but costly!

SPECIAL TOPIC: SANCTIFICATION

▣ **"but doers of the Law"** God demands an obedient lifestyle (cf. Lev. 18:5; Matt. 7:24-27; Luke 8:21; 11:28; John 13:17; James 1:22-25; 2:14-28). In many ways this concept mimics the Hebrew term *shema* (BDB 1033), which meant to hear so as to do (cf. Deut. 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9-10).

SPECIAL TOPIC: KEEP

2:14

NASB **"For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves"**

NKJV **"for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves"**

NRSV **"When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves"**

TEV **"The Gentiles do not have the Law, but whenever of their own free will they do what the Law commands, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the Law"**

NJB **"For instance, pagans who never hear of the Law but are led by reason to do what the Law commands, may not actually 'possess' the Law, but, they can be said to 'be' the Law"**

REB **"When Gentiles who do not possess the law carry out its precepts by the light of nature, then although they have no law, they are their own law"**

Peshitta **"For if Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law to themselves"**

All cultures have an inner moral law, a societal norm. They are responsible for the light they have (cf. 1 Cor. 9:21). This verse was not meant to imply that they can be right with God if they live in light of their culture, but that they are responsible for their innate knowledge of God.

2:15 "their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" There is an inner moral voice. But only Scripture, enlightened by the Spirit, can be fully trusted. Fallenness has affected our conscience. However, creation (Rom. 1:18-20) and this inner, moral law (Rom. 2:14-15) are all the knowledge of God that some humans possess. There was no Hebrew term that was equivalent to the Greek word for "conscience" (*syneidesis*). The Greek concept of an inner moral sense of right and wrong was often discussed by the Stoic philosophers. Paul was familiar with the Greek philosophers (he quotes Cleanthes in Acts 17:28; Menander in 1 Cor. 15:33; and Epimenides in Titus 1:12) from his early education in Tarsus. His hometown was known for its excellent schools of Greek rhetoric and philosophy.

SPECIAL TOPIC: CONSCIENCE

2:16 "on the day" This refers to the day of God's wrath. See note at Rom. 2:5.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THAT DAY

▣ **"according to my gospel"** In context this referred to Paul's preaching of the revelation of Jesus Christ. The PRONOUN "my" reflected Paul's understanding of the stewardship of the gospel that had been entrusted to him (cf. Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 15:1; Gal. 1:11-12; 2:7; 1 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 2:8). It was not uniquely his, but as the Apostle to the Gentiles he felt an awesome sense of responsibility for spreading the truth about Jesus in the Greco-Roman world.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE GOSPEL

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE *KERYGMA* OF THE EARLY CHURCH

▣ **"God will judge the secrets of men"** God knows the hearts of all people (cf. 1 Sam. 2:7; 16:7; 1 Kgs. 8:39; 1 Chr. 28:9; 2 Chr. 6:30; Ps. 7:9; 44:21; 139:1-6; Pro. 15:11; 21:2; Jer. 11:20; 17:10; 20:12; Luke 15:16; Acts 1:24; 15:8; Rom. 8:27; Rev. 2:23). The Father, through the agency of the Son, will bring both motive and action into judicial review (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15).

SPECIAL TOPIC: JUDGMENT IN THE NT

▣ **"through Christ Jesus"** Jesus did not come to act as judge (cf. John 3:17-21). He came to

1. reveal God the Father
2. die a substitutionary death
3. give believers an example to follow

When people reject Jesus they judge themselves (cf. John 3:18).

However, the NT also teaches that Jesus will act as the Father's representative in judgment (cf. John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1). The tension between Jesus as Judge and/or Savior can be seen in John's Gospel (cf. John 3:17-21 versus John 9:39).

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHRIST JESUS AS LORD

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 2:17-24

17But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, 18and know *His* will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, 19and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, 21you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 22You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

2:17 "if" This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author's point of view or for his literary purposes. This condition extends to Rom. 2:20 but has no conclusion, therefore, TEV translates them as assumed affirmations which Paul would make. The Jews were trusting in their lineage, traditions, and performance to provide salvation.

▣ **"boast in God"** Many Jews were relying on

1. their racial lineage to Abraham (i.e., Matt. 3:9; John 8:33,37,39)
2. their personal performance of the Mosaic Law

as the means of being accepted by God. However, their self-righteous legalism separated them from God (cf. Matt. 5:20; Galatians 3). What tragic irony!

Paul develops the idea of "boasting" in 1 Corinthians. Paul faced an arrogant Jewish traditionalism (i.e., the Oral Law) and an arrogant Greek intellectualism. The bottom line is no flesh will glory before God.

SPECIAL TOPIC: BOASTING

2:18 "approve" This is the Greek VERB *dokimazō* in its PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE form.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK TERMS FOR TESTING AND THEIR CONNOTATIONS

▣ **"the Law"** Verses 17ff. deal with the Jewish people, therefore, the term "the Law" must refer in this context to the Mosaic Law. This is confirmed by Rom. 2:25 which deals with circumcision.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEW OF THE MOSAIC LAW

2:18-20 The Jewish leaders believed their way (their sect of Judaism) was the right way, the only way to God. They were confident that they were the true teachers about religious matters (cf. Matt. 15:14). Privilege brings responsibility (cf. Luke 12:48).

Notice the parallel phrases related to their confidence (cf. Matt. 15:14; 23:16,24; Luke 6:39).

1. a guide to the blind, Rom. 2:19
2. a light to those in darkness, Rom. 2:19
3. a corrector of the foolish, Rom. 2:20
4. a teacher of the immature, Rom. 2:20
5. having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, Rom. 2:20

2:21-24 If one trusts in personal obedience, then that obedience must be complete (cf. Matt. 5:20; Gal. 3:10, which is a quote from Deut. 27:26; 5:3; James 2:10). This is an impossibility for fallen mankind. Paul asks poses rhetorical questions to his Jewish readers/hearers in Rom. 2:21-23.

2:22 It is difficult to know to what Paul was referring in Rom. 2:22-23. Since the description does not fit most Jews of Paul's day it is possible that these sins are used in a spiritual sense similar to how Jesus interpreted the Law in Matt. 5:20-48. George Ladd in *A Theology of the New Testament*, says "Paul must be referring to robbing God of the honor due him, spiritual adultery, and profaning the devotion due God alone by exalting themselves as judge and lord over their fellow creatures." p. 505.

2:22 "abhor idols" The turning away from something because of stench is the root meaning of this term.

▣ **"do you rob temples"** It is uncertain historically to what this referred but it was somehow related to idolatry.

2:23 "boast" See SPECIAL TOPIC: BOASTING

2:24 This is a quote from Isaiah 52:5 in the Septuagint. God's blessing of Israel for covenant keeping (cf. Deuteronomy 27-28) was meant to be a witness to the world. However, Israel never kept the covenant, therefore, the world saw only the judgment of God (cf. Ezek. 36:22-32). Israel was to be a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod. 19:5-6), to bring all the world to faith in YHWH (cf. Gen. 12:3; Eph. 2:11-3:13).

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 2:25-29

[25]For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. [26]So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? [27]And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter *of the Law* and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? [28]For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. [29]But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. [2]Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

2:25 "circumcision" Paul is still using diatribe. Someone will raise the statement that, well at least we are circumcised (cf. Gen. 17:10-11). We are in the line of Abraham. Paul plainly and boldly dismantles this cherished Jewish claim (cf. Matt. 3:7-10; John 8:31-59).

All of Israel's neighbors except the Philistines were circumcised. It was not the act itself that was significant; it was the continuing faith of the recipient (cf. Rom. 2:26-27; Deut. 10:16; 30:6). This is true of all religious rituals. Religious people often want the blessings of God's covenant but without the responsibilities.

SPECIAL TOPIC: CIRCUMCISION

2:25-26 "if. . .if. . .if" These are three THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES which refer to possible future action. Obedience (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28) is the key in Paul's argument in Romans 2, but not in Rom. 3:21-31 (cf. Galatians 3). Obedience is the result of salvation but grace is the basis (cf. Eph. 2:8-10).

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS

2:26-27 These verses hold out hope that some Gentiles have responded to the light they have (grammar expects a "yes" answer in Rom. 2:26). The only possible biblical example of this would be Cornelius of Acts 10. Yet he does not quite fit this verse because he was a God-fearer and worshiped at the local synagogue.

These verses are in reality a counterpoint to Paul's argument about the need of salvation for the Jews. Romans 3:23 is the summary that all humans are spiritually lost without Christ. If there are Gentiles who live up to the light they have from creation and an inner moral sensitivity, God will provide an opportunity for them to respond to Christ—somehow, someway, sometime.

2:28-29 "For he is not a Jew. . .he is a Jew" This is an extremely important discussion because some modern theological groups attempt to separate the OT people of God from the NT people of God. There is only one covenant and one people (cf. Rom. 9:6; Gal. 3:7-9, 29; 6:16; 1 Pet. 3:6). The new covenant is a development and fulfillment of the old (cf. Gen. 3:15; Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 5:17-19). The people of God have always been so by faith, not lineage. They are a "heart people" not ritual or racial people. Faith, not the parent, is the key. Covenant mind, not covenant sign, is the mark.

SPECIAL TOPIC: JEWS

▣ **"flesh"** This term is used in several senses. See SPECIAL TOPIC: FLESH (*SARX*)

2:29 The covenant sign of circumcision (cf. Gen. 17:14) was imagery in the OT for one's openness to God. It developed analogously in several ways

1. heart circumcision (cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:24-25)
2. ear circumcision (cf. Jer. 6:10)
3. lip circumcision (cf. Exod. 6:12,30)

The Law was never meant to be an external code, but a life transforming daily relationship with YHWH that revealed His character and promises to all the children of Adam.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEW OF THE MOSAIC LAW

▣

NASB	**"that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter"**
NKJV	**"that of the heart, in the Spsirit, and not in the letter"**
NRSV, REB	**"a matter of the heart – it is spiritual and not literal"**
TEV	**"which is the work of God's Spirit, not of the written Law"**
NJB	**"in the heart—somelthing not of the letter but of the spirit"**
Peshitta	**"of the heart, spiritually and not literally"**

This phrase is ambiguous in Greek. Some translations take it to refer to

1. the spiritual versus the literal (cf. NRSV, the Twentieth Century New Testament, the Knox translation, the Lamsa translation of the Peshitta, the Williams translation and the New Berkeley Version)
2. the contrast as between the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6, where a similar construction occurs) and the written text (cf. NASB, NKJV, NEB, NIV and TEV)
3. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 299, gives the suggestion that based on 2 Cor. 3:6 it was Paul's metaphorical/literary way of referring to the Old Covenant and the New Covenant; the first characterized by an external code and the second by an internal new mind and new spirit given by the Holy Spirit in the new age of the Spirit.

Paul has been discussing the fact that some Gentiles might act pleasing to God apart from the Law. If this is true then the children of God included more than those who had been only physically circumcised (cf. Galatians). God's family is wider than racial Jews (cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:3; Exod. 19:5); Job, Melchizedek, Jethro, Caleb, Rahab, and Ruth were not racially Jewish. Even the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were half Egyptian (cf. Gen. 41:50-52).

Salvation and righteousness are by faith and life, not lineage!

SPECIAL TOPIC: HEART

SPECIAL TOPIC: SPIRIT IN THE NT

| Home | New Testament Studies | Romans Table of Contents | Previous Section | Next Section |

Copyright © 2014 Bible Lessons International